TNE003

Special Supplement M1 Virus Discussion in The New Era

History of The Imperium Working Group
New Zealand

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The original text by the author known as R.F. has been redacted due to a publishing rights removal. We encoruage readers to source HIWG document 245.1 directly to fill in this gap.

This edition contains some editorial changes and the addition of the Preamble.

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Preamble

This publication is a reissue of two related discussions documents written by the authors in the 1990s for the History of the Imperium Working Group New Zealand as a prelude to work they performed for the Meshan Sector set during The New Era.

The ideas are not canon for Traveller, but were an exploration of ideas that were to shape some of the TNE Meshan work by various developers.

The original documents appeared only as TXT files that may be found on some websites and HIWG CDs. Both appeared in the 3rd issue of The Meshan Saga in 1998, published by FSpace Publications under the original document titles. The Meshan Saga is available on some websites and on product CD/DVDs shipped by FSpace Publications.

They are republished here to preserve the work in a viable modern format, ensure the copyrights of the authors are asserted and to provide a context alongside other Meshan Sector documents that are being made available.

The GDW questions posed by the authors were never answered, either directly, or indirectly through product releases or other channels. The format of the original publication and distribution mechanism meant this was probably viewed as a hobbyist effort at the time. We do not even know if Marc Miller or his staff even read it, let alone heard about it. Traveller The New Era was discontinued, and many versions of Traveller have been released since and the universe has effectively returned to the pre-Rebellion setting.

R.F. parted ways with FSpace Publications when the later Classic Traveller project for Meshan Sector stalled, and isn't one of those authors who worked on recycling this older Traveller work into *Far Frontiers* and *Far Encounters* products. Martin Rait has used his own work as part of a small component of the larger Mech threat phenomena in FSpaceRPG™ - which is something very different compared to the Traveller New Era virus.

It is hoped in the future that FSpace Publications can renew it's Classic Traveller Meshan Sector publishing licence.

For now, this publication (in the format presented here) will be found in non-commercial releases by FSpace Publications directly, or as part of the publication collections found on FSpace DVDs released from 2019 onwards. It will also be viewable at the New Zealand National Library.

Meshan Virus Scenario Concepts

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Virus 'Ecology' & The New Sentient Order of the Universe?

By Martin Rait

Introduction

This document has come about after discussions concerning the nature of the virus with Rick Meadows (245). We came across a number of stumbling blocks in developing Meshan sector with virus effects.

Document 245.1 details Rick's concerns with scenario specific virus problems he faces. This has arisen due to a lack of information concerning the nature of the virus and how it operates.

In this document I intend to look at the nature of the virus from published material. After that I will outline some possibilities for the virus and their implications for the Traveller universe.

Many of the points I will raise will need clarification by GDW.

Nature of the Virus

The virus has it's origins as a modified Cymbeline chip for use in Imperial transponder systems. Transponder chips imprinted information on each other via radio communications. This imprinting was a means of verifying ship identity.

The initial virus was a modified transponder chip which was designed to imprint specific programming onto other transponder chips. So at first the virus was based in transponder chips.

However the virus code was designed to generate an encrypted code 'seed' that expanded to take over computer systems attached to the transponder system. At this point the virus has moved to become a pure 'data' entity.

As a data entity it can infect non-cymbeline based systems using data 'seeds' that spread until they can find a large enough system to grow into an active virus.

An active virus is transformed by the system in which it resides. Therefore virus evolution can result from the system they inhabit. Evolution can also occur due to corruption of data. Evolution via intelligent decisions can also be done. A virus can tailor it's seeds deliberately. An example of this is the 1A "Suicide Inducer" which has remained alive and releases strain 1 "Suiciders" instead of duplicates of itself.

For a 'seed' to spread the carrier requires enough memory/storage space to contain it. To expand and become active a 'seed' needs to inhabit a system with enough processing power (typically parallel) and sufficient memory/storage space.

Assumption

The virus is a data based entity. This means that it requires memory/storage space to inhabit. Because of the nature of mass parallel machines, enough memory would normally be present. This assumption should fit with the many small electronic devices that have been stated as being to 'dumb' to host a virus.

Virus Capabilities

The modern data entity based virus depends on the system it inhabits for it's abilities. Starships provide mobility, weapons and communication abilities. Robots provide human scale mobility and operations.

As shown in Smash & Grab a virus has gained psionics in a specific computer system. Because the nature of the virus is data based a 'psionic' virus cannot have 'psionic' children, unless they inhabit psionic capable systems.

Dealing with the Virus

As detailed already the most common method of dealing with the virus is by isolating computer systems from each other, and using humans for inter-machine communications. This is meant to stop infections.

The other method involves making 'dumb' machines which the virus is unable to inhabit. This would be common for machines in communications systems. A brute force method involves electrical overloading, or stripping out virus inhabited components. More complex anti-viral systems are obviously being developed by the Regency and the Hivers using tailored virus systems.

A good approach to stop virus control of peripheral devices is to have hardwired circuitry with the instructions on ROM (i.e. read only) systems. It is conceivable that many devices that control vital systems will use ROM based operations. For instance a life support system could be run by a computer using ROM based operating parameters. Using limited processing power and pre-generated situational instructions will mean the system is immune to virus infection.

Another possibility related to using a tailored virus could also be used. Since the virus is a self-aware data entity it is similar to TL 17 AI machines. A non-virus based AI entity could be used to counter the virus. The implications of the virus facing an opponent in computer-space is quite appealing. Could a neural linked human with virus proof computer enhancements battle the virus in computer(cyber)-space?

A recorded human consciousness operating in a machine could also be interesting. This is similar to the human derived entity taking on a Berserker machine in Larry Niven's story 'A Teardrop Falls' which is set in Fred Saberhagen's Berserker universe.

Can a lower tech synthetic computer entity (the traditional concept of a computer virus) be used in anti-virus operations? The possibilities on this front are interesting and need answering by GDW.

New Environments for Virus?

Apart from smart computer systems there is another environment with the same sorts of characteristics and is just as numerous. This other environment is organic intelligences. This area of virus discussion becomes the most scary for the Traveller setting. What happens if the virus takes over people?

Firstly the virus needs to get into the organic brain in a coherent functional manner. Two methods seem possible for this move into a new environment.

Cybernetic neural links provide a direct link into a beings mind via the sensory neural pathways. The machinery in between the jack and the computer is a translation device. The translator turns computer generated data into organic sensory data.

Since jacks are often used for VR (virtual reality) links for remote piloting, simulations or external sensor feeds, the jack can receive a variety of data. Jacks are also often used to send data/instructions from the person to the computer. Essentially the neural jack is an electronic I/O bus on an organic being.

The other method involves psionics. If Droyne have the ability to conduct 'train' and 'forgetfulness' under telepathy it might be possible for a virus to inhabit a machine in which it can use similar psionic talents. With such talents a virus could implant a seed into a person's mind. Psionic possession by humans has been published a couple of times (namely a DGP Digest adventure). Virus possession of organics could also be a possibility.

This transfer to an organic mind might seem like an interesting scenario idea. However I would raise a flag of caution against this. If it can be done once it can happen again. Since there are alliance builders, group minds and virus's with huge automated facilities out there it would be quite possible for them to mass manufacture 'Viral Organics'.

Does GDW want a Borg type civilisation appearing where a race of humans springs up with mental virus infections? Can the horror of young babies being neural jacked and virus impregnated be tolerated? Can mass planetary conversions be viewed as the natural evolution of sentient species? No, I don't think so.

Conclusion

GDW must answer these questions and define the limitations of the virus. The material on the virus that has been published is sufficient for the users of the game. However if HIWG members are going to do developments which are consistent with GDW then the law must be stated concerning the virus. Facts and figures are required, not vague statements.

The very existence of the Traveller universe is threatened by the virus. GDW need to respond to save the day. Otherwise I'm going to write this 'viral organic' horror up for Meshan sector. It might fit the black curtain better though.

So, GDW what do you think? If you like these concepts, I'd like a hand in it. If you don't like the implications then I suggest you outline limitations with some coherent reasons backing them up.

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Online topics

The website of FSpace Publications still contains articles useful for those interested in Traveller, Meshan Sector, our Traveller related publications, and how to use the generic (Far Encounters, Far Frontiers, Just The Plans) & FSpaceRPG publications with Traveller. Check out the following links or use the QR codes.

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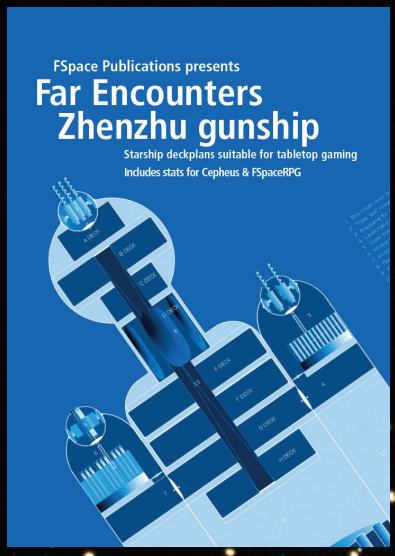

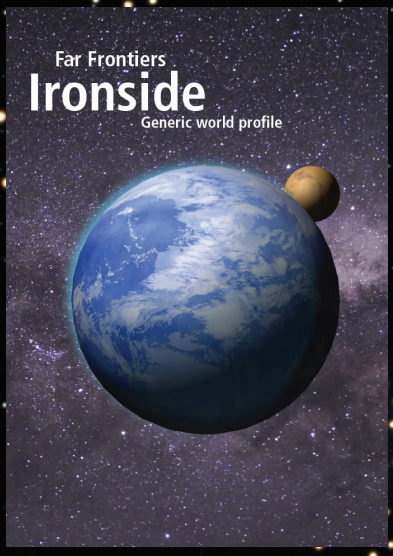

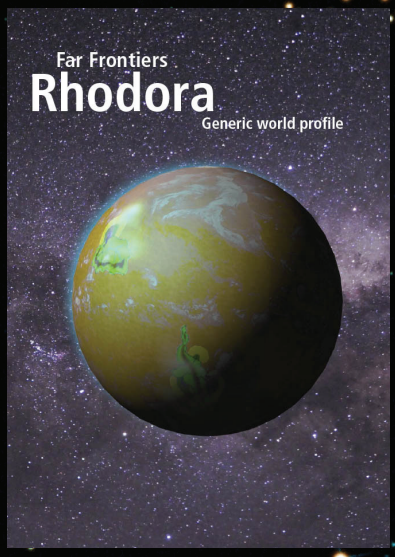

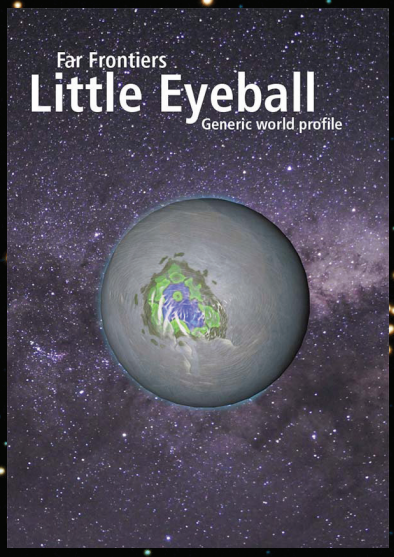

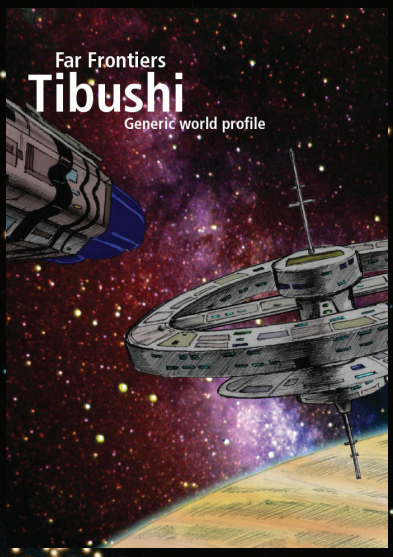

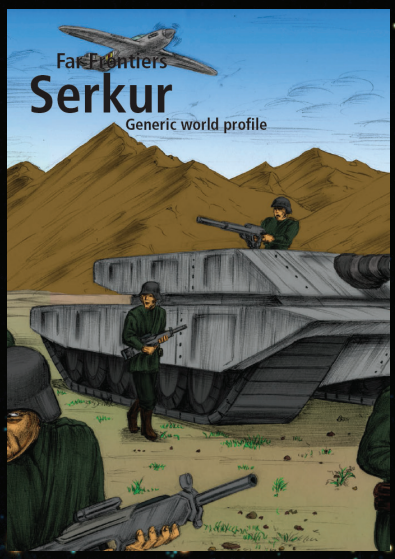

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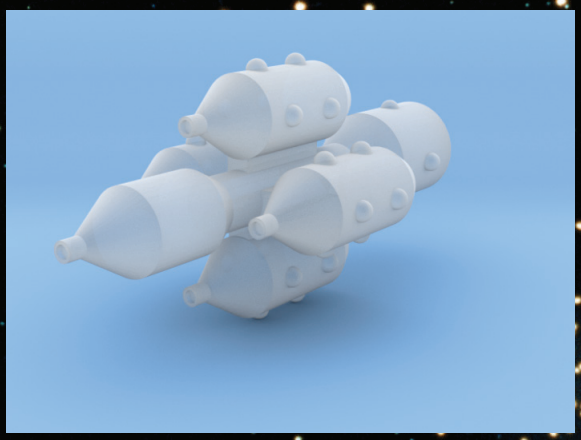

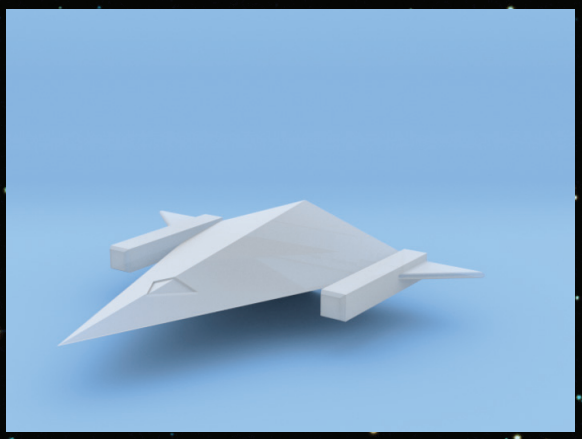

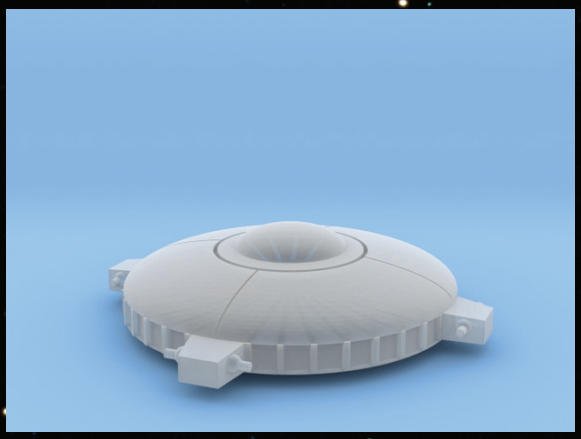

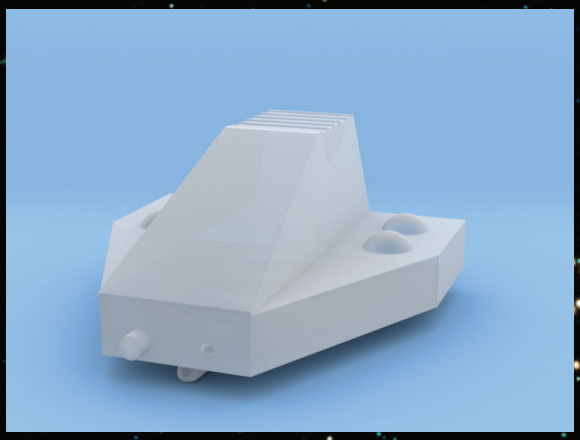

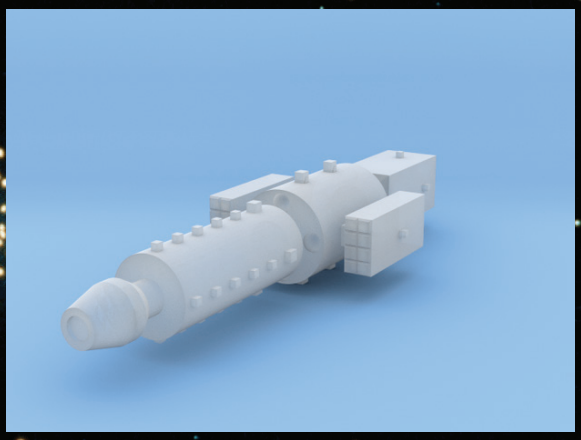

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The Virus is a threat to all modern technology and the civilisations that depend upon it. Are there others ways for the Virus to spread?

Is it even a direct threat to the individuality of intelligent life in the galaxy?

This supplement discusses some ideas to prompt new ways to think about the threat the Virus could pose that isn’t known yet.